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ABSTRACT

If children are to achieve their potential they must be provided with the support they need personally, socially, as well as academically. Studies have shown the need for elementary school counselors as indicated by various educators. The purpose of this study was to determine the need for elementary school counselors as indicated by elementary school students. Participants in the study were students enrolled in a Mississippi public school district which had five elementary schools with no counselors or counseling services. Participants (N=659) were students in grades three through six. The What I Need survey, a 23-item survey developed by the Mississippi State Department of Education which assesses personal, social, academic and career needs, was used. The results indicated that 76% if the students would talk to the counselor if they had personal problems and 75% believed that if they told the counselor secret information the counselor would keep it secret. Approximately 72% of the students indicated a need for personal counseling. Approximately 89% of the students showed a need for academic guidance. The greatest need indicated by the students was for career guidance (approximately 91%). (Contains 15 references.) (ABL)

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A DYING NEED FOR COUNSELORS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A STUDENT SURVEY

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A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of
the Mid-South Educational Research Association
Knoxville, Tennessee

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According to a 50-State Survey (Glosoff & Koprowicz, 1990), only 8 states have legislative mandates for elementary school counselors, however, interest in guidance and counseling in the elementary school is growing rapidly across the United States (Solomon, 1988). Everyday, 2,987 American children see their parents divorced; every 26 seconds, a child runs away from home; every 47 seconds, a child is abused or neglected; every 7 minutes, a child is killed or injured by guns; every 53 minutes, a child dies because of poverty; everyday, 100,000 children are homeless; every school day, 135,000 children bring guns to school; every 8 seconds of the school day, a child drops out; everyday, six teenagers commit suicide; and every year, 100,000 children ages 7-17 are held in jails. One or several of these influences do exist for many children of elementary school age, and they set the stage for future problems if they are not dealt with as early as possible in a child's life (MDC, Inc., 1988).

Many educators are coming to grips with the fact that children are the future of our families, our communities, and our nation; that we will one day depend on them personally, politically, and economically. Therefore, it is in our best interest to see that our children develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become healthy, productive adults. It is in our best interest to make the United States a nation of children achieving their potential.

If the children are to achieve their potential they must be provided with the support they need personally, socially, as well as academically. This support is best provided through early intervention — the need to try to prevent problems before they become crises; to teach young children coping strategies before they become high school dropouts and statistics on teenage pregnancy (Glosoff & Koprowicz, 1990).

Elementary school counselors are trained to use early intervention strategies to help

children achieve their potential by working with the whole child. They act as a bridge between teachers and parents, schools and social service agencies, families and children.

The number of studies addressing positive results of early intervention through elementary counselors has recently increased (Gibson, 1989). In a follow-up study of 117 fourth graders of which the experimental group had 2.5 years of counseling and the control group had no counseling, the experimental group showed significant differences in class rank as high school seniors (Jackson, Cleveland, & Maranda, 1975). Three years after Florida hired elementary counselors, students who were underachievers in reading advanced 1.1 years in seven months (Barrientos & Glossbrenner, 1989). In a follow-up study of high school students, those who received elementary guidance and counseling achieved higher and made better responsible choices of courses of study in junior high and high school than those who did not (Adam, 1974; Doyle, 1976). The United States Office of Education discovered 47 percent fewer dropouts and 50 percent fewer failures in schools that had adequate counselor/student ratio (American School Counselors Association, 1990). Children who participated in counseling groups for children of divorced parents showed better school performance than those who had no counseling. Students (third through sixth graders) who had been referred to small group counseling by their teachers for exhibiting hostile and aggressive behavior scored significantly lower on measures of aggression and hostility than a control group at the conclusion of the intervention (Omizo, Hershberger, & Omizo, 1988). Evaluations of elementary student counseling centers in California showed a reduction of 80-90 percent in suspensions and referrals to the principal (Miller, 1989). Students participating in an elementary school counseling group for young procrastinators (grades three through six) significantly improve their homework completion scores when compared with those of fellow procrastinators waiting to be in the group

(Morse, 1987). Weekly group guidance sessions provided to elementary students identified to be at high risk of dropping out resulted in significant improvement in attendance, school attitude, and self-esteem (Barrientos & Glossbrenner, 1989).

Studies have shown the need for elementary school counselors as indicated by various educators. The purpose of this study is to determine the need for elementary school counselors as indicated by elementary school students.

Method

The participates in this study were students enrolled in a public school district in Mississippi. The district had five elementary schools with no counselors nor counseling services. Six hundred fifty-nine (N - 659) students (grades three through six) were randomly selected from the five schools.

Procedure

Data were collected through the utilization of the *What I Need* survey. The 23-item instrument, developed by the Mississippi State Department of Education, was provided in *A Model Guide for Elementary Counselors* (1980). Twenty-one items that assessed personal, social, academic and career needs required students to indicate by a check, "I Need Help."

Two yes-no questions assessed how much the students would trust the counselor to help meet their needs: "If you had a personal problem, would you talk to the counselor?" and "If you told the counselor secret information, would he/she keep it?"

Results

Twenty-one questions were used to assess the students' personal, social, academic

and career needs. Table 1 provides these results. Two questions assessed the students' trust in the counselor as a helper in meeting their needs. These results are revealed in Table 2. Seventy-six percent revealed that if they had personal problems, they would talk to the counselor, and 75% believed that if they told the counselor secret information, he/she would keep it.

Approximately 72% of the students indicated a need for personal counseling which was assessed by questions 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 15. Questions 7, 14, 19, and 20 addressed social needs of which 73% of the students indicated. Approximately 89% of the students showed a need for academic guidance which was assessed by questions 1, 5, 13, 17, and 18. The greatest need indicated by the students was career guidance (approximately 91%). This need was assessed by questions 4, 9, 12, 16, and 21 (Table 3).

TABLE 1
Percentage of Students Indicating Need for Help
(N - 659)

Item		Percentage I Need Help
I Need:		
1	To know how I did on my standardized tests.	86
2	To learn how to get along better with my parents.	70
3	To learn more about why I act the way I do.	92
4	To learn more about different careers and jobs.	92
5	To know more about my strengths and weaknesses in school work.	92
6	To learn how to get along better with my brothers and sisters	67
7	To learn how to get along with my friends better.	72
8	To learn how to make decisions and be more sure of myself.	77
9	To learn about my interests and abilities and what careers go along with them.	87
10	To learn how to tell others how I feel	69
11	To talk with someone about my personal problems.	84
12	To be able to go different places and watch people work.	89
13	To know what to expect in junior high and high school.	93
14	To learn how to get along with the opposite sex.	62
15	To learn to like myself better.	63
16	To learn about different kinds of work that people do in our area.	89
17	To find out how to improve my weakest subjects.	91
18	To learn how to get along at home and at school.	82
19	To know how to get along with my teachers.	75
20	To know more about drugs and alcohol.	82
21	To learn how school subjects can help me prepare for a job.	97

TABLE 2 Percentage of Students Indicating Trust in the Counselor as a Helper (N - 659)		
Item		Percentage Yes
22	If you had a personal problem, would you talk to the counselor?	76
23	If you told the counselor secret information, would he/she keep it?	75

TABLE 3 Percentage of Students Indicating Area of Need (N - 659)		
Area of Need		Percentage
	Personal Counseling	72
	Social Guidance	73
	Academic Guidance	89
	Career Guidance	91

Summary

Since the earliest guidance and counseling programs in our nation's public schools, the need for elementary school counselors has been largely ignored. The importance of attending systematically and effectely to personal, social, academic and career development of elementary school children, however, has been clearly validated, and counseling professionals can no longer delay in providing the kinds of guidance programs that will make a positive difference in the lives of children in the present and the future.

This article has presented data that reveals the urgent need for counselors in the elementary school as viewed by the children. Our children are crying out for our help. They need our help now. "They have a right to those skills that will enable them to be successful and to cope with this complex society. They have only one opportunity to grow up. We have the responsibility to see they have help to do it right" (Des Moines Publice Schools, 1988).

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State Policy for Elementary School Counselors

State	Elem. Couns. Mandate		If Yes: Source of Mandate			Ratio	Funding Source:		If No: Is Mandate Considered?		Any Elem. Couns.?	
	Yes	No	Legis.	State Dept.	State Board	Ratio	State	Local	Yes	No	Yes	No
AL	X			X		1:400	X	X			X	
AK		X								X	X	
AZ		X								X	X	
AR	X		X			1:450		X			X	
CA		X								X	X	
CO		X								X	X	
CT		X								X	X	
DE		X							X		X	
DC		X						X		X	X	
FL		X					X				X	
GA		X							X		X	
HI	X		X	X		None	X				X	
ID		X								X	X	
IL		X								X	X	
IN		X								X	X	
LA	X		X	X	X	None	X				X	
KS		X								X	X	
KY		X							X		X	
LA		X								X	X	
ME	X		X			None		X			X	
MD		X								X	X	
MA		X							X		X	
MI		X								X	X	
MN		X								X	X	
MS		X							X		X	
MO		X						X		X	X	
MT	X				X	1:400	X	X			X	
NE		X								X	X	
NV		X							X		X	
NH	X				X	1:500		X			X	
NJ		X								X	X	
NM		X								X	X	
NY		X								X	X	
NC	X		X	X	X	1:400	X	X			X	
ND		X								X	X	

State	Elem. Couns. Mandate		If Yes: Source of Mandate			Ratio	Funding Source:		If No: Is Mandate Considered?		Any Elem. Couns.?	
	Yes	No	Legis.	State Dept.	State Board	Ratio	State	Local	Yes	No	Yes	No
OH		X								X	X	
OK		X								X	X	
OR		X							X		X	
PA		X								X	X	
RI		X							X		X	
SC	X		X	X	X	Flex.	X				X	
SD		X								X	X	
TN		X							X		X	
TX		X							X		X	
UT		X								X	X	
VT	X			X		1:400		X			X	
VA	X		X		X	1:500	X				X	
WA		X							X		X	
WV	X		X			1:500		X			X	
WI		X							X		X	
WY		X								X	X	

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, December 1989